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signs, as the good of the whole city will be greatly and competently served thereby.

The Parisians would not approve any structure which would render Paris unsightly, and we should have and show as much interest in our City as the French do in their capital. Some years ago an American insurance company wished to build what would not seem to us an unusual monstrosity, the plan being, as we remember, for a building eighteen or twenty stories in height. But the Parisians would not hear of it. They would not have the generally harmonious contour of the skyline of Paris ruined by such a structure. We should have more of the same spirit which France has. Much the same occurred in Berlin when the plans of an American insurance company were curtailed.

A movement should be inaugurated to obtain the passage by the Board of Aldermen of an ordinance prohibiting any projecting signs from being installed on the Avenue. The co-operation of the different civic associations should be obtained, and the aid of the daily newspapers should be invoked to educate the people to the idea of the great public calamity it would be, to see Fifth Avenue ruined. Thus we could obviate the outcry which might otherwise be raised that legislation against or in favor of a particular locality was being attempted. Of course the electric light companies and the sign manufacturers might object, but it should be possible to show them that anything which will harm Fifth Avenue, and thereby the City, will not benefit them in the larger business sense.

Several months ago the writer inaugurated a campaign to save Fifth Avenue from this incubus and enlisted the interest of merchants' associations and of individuals. It now suggests itself that a preliminary Committee be formed to take up the matter *de novo*, to propose and consider suitable names for

membership upon a Permanent Committee to determine Ways and Means for the regulation of objectionable and projecting signs. This would probably result in some effectual accomplishment.

"Now Augustus was a wise ruler and Rome prospered under him, and he greatly embellished the City." Thus as children we used to read in our histories of the great emperor of the Romans, and who has not had his interest awakened by all of the great constructive monarchs who improved and embellished their cities? The age of Perikles lives ever in our memories as being also the age of Pheidias, when Athens was at the zenith of her intellectual and artistic development. The splendor of her architectural achievements has made her name the synonym of all beauty, refinement and grace throughout the ages; "the glory that was Greece" will be the wonder and admiration for all time.

We are glad to have our great City great as she is in commerce, in development, in mental activity, in philanthropy and in the many, many ways by which she is pre-eminent among cities; but we certainly do not care to have her great in ugliness! New York should grow in comeliness as in other respects; it behoves all New Yorkers to take such pride in her as to use their influence to aid in constructive work looking to the betterment of the City's appearance.

The mental attitude of the population is reacted upon and influenced by the surroundings upon which its eyes rest, to a much greater extent than is generally realized, and we must have the elevating influence of a harmonious environment to aid the regenerating influences which the best element of the community is constantly pouring forth into the public consciousness. Instead of ugliness the people should have ever before them the highest possible concept of beauty, symmetry and proportion, if they are to realize these in their lives, for, "Where there is no vision the people perish."

G. Glen Gould

## THE ÆSTHETIC IDEAL CONCEPTIONS OF THE IDEAL

By FR. ROUSSEL-DESPIERRES

*Translated from the French*

### BOOK I—CHAPTER III—*Continued*

THE superiority of the æsthetic ideal resides in this, that at one and the same time it is an attractive and optimistic ideal and a very pure moral one. One could scarcely prove this superiority better than through the imperfection of the other conceptions of Destiny; this alone fulfills in fact that double condition of optimism and purity by which we recognize an ideal worthy of mankind.

When one takes a rapid review of the most characteristic among the conceptions of destiny, it appears that the latter may be grouped in a general way into three grand categories having somewhat uncertain boundaries.

The first includes the naturalistic, materialistic conceptions which, by way of altruism as well as egoism, tend toward the satisfaction of terrestrial interest, and in which the optimistic principle is

affirmed. The second embraces pessimistic conceptions, in general the super-naturalistic, whether they belong to a religion or to a spiritualist philosophy. In the third we will group the systems based upon the pure idea of morality, for the most part inclined to a disgust or disdain of real life which is common to them and to religion.

Initial optimism or final optimism, the first of these doctrines reposes on this double belief: that life is not an evil in itself and that it can and should some day become perfectly happy. These place the golden age, the Eden of primitive religions, not in the cradle of vanished races but on the threshold of a future more or less rapidly approaching. The grand hope which invigorates them is that of progress.

Taken all in all, pagan antiquity was an age

of philosophical optimism, but an optimism more simple and immediate than ours. It expected no less of the present moment than of that future to which we adjourn our most beautiful hopes. Antique philosophy (and this also is the principle of Chinese wisdom) considered the greatest good of contemporary man. Ours, which has without doubt received from christianism the poorly pondered lassitude of present times, strives to prepare for future and distant generations a happy life—the conception of which, in truth, will be completely out of fashion after one or two generations. It is educational, political, social. The other dreamed more of the individual. We dare not decide which is the wiser. Perhaps while occupying ourselves concerning the lot of future generations which are one with ourselves, and concerning which we assume a heavy responsibility, a complete philosophy ought not to forget the living generation, the only one whose needs, aspirations and faculties it understands.

What we owe as a duty in especial to the coming generations is liberty. Like us, they will have an ideal, and we have no right, we have no power to prescribe to them their task. Like us, our grandsons will wish to live their own life, apply their own conception; let us not embarrass their initiative. We shall have fulfilled our duty as forebears by leaving them the example of a morally happy, pacific society.

What remains of the least forgotten systems? A principle, a hypothesis, a formula, which, thrown into the melting-pot of doctrines, combines these into unexpected forms. What remains of so many books, so many efforts? Some pages, the phrase of a man of genius which gathers a school about it! The remainder is nought but an echo, a somewhat confused echo of numberless cries of hope—vain indeed if one should measure it against the explosion of our ambition, but not in vain, not useless—for it contributes to the creation in humanity of a confident mentality, that desire for the best which always brings forth some good.

The first interest of man is to live—and that is also his fundamental instinct. Certain philosophers propose to human hope the expansion of life as an ideal. But nothing is vaguer than such a formula. Expansion of life—is that anything else but the instinctive blossoming of the caprices or the wishes of desire? Must we then obey all the temptations which assail us? Or ought we choose among them? But, choose with what right? And, besides, how exercise a choice? The free expansion of life does not admit of sacrifices. Recognizing that there are necessary sacrifices is, in a way, to cut short the life, to mutilate it. Thither indeed conduct those doctrines which despise and oppress life. Is there no other aim but to preserve and increase the multitude of living organisms? Then one would reduce human activity to the satisfaction of material needs. That would subject us to an infinite misery, for the limit of needs and desires is ceaselessly moving back, and torture accompanies them. Besides, what employment of our faculties, save service of that in us which is the humblest of all? Thought would not find its solution there; our dream will always pass far beyond that! Such a life would have no value. Now the value of life, as Guyau has very justly said, is very variable; it may be reduced to zero; and on

the contrary there are certain moments for the sake of which it is not irrational to sacrifice a whole existence. Verily life is not an aim; if it has any price, it is because it is the means to a more distant and lofty goal.

Expansion of life! Doubtless this formula implies a respect for all the existences, all the individualities? But it also admits the struggle for life, which, given to human energy as a theme, would be the most revolting of moral theories. Life, in fine, meets in nature with resistance; life opposes life; its expansion drives against limitations, if no other, then those of habitat and subsistence. From many a point of view a similar conception is inferior to the intellectual ideal or the moral ideal, which, one and the other, propose to our activity a field without limits.

Desire, or pleasure which is only the realization of desire, does not fill the destiny of man any better. One may satisfy a desire, one cannot satisfy the soul. Servitude to pleasure is perhaps the worst slavery of all; even if it were not deceptive, voluptuousness would not even offer the most seductive of chimeras: apostles, scientists embrace their ideals with an ardor singularly more lively than the passion of voluptuousness borne along by the fury of enjoyment. Pleasure is short-lived; an infinite ideal is the only one which never deceives.

But happiness? The original dream of man, is not that his real end? In effect, is it not the strongest instinct of nature, after the will to exist? Has it not indestructible roots in our physiological constitution? Is not the idea of happiness thus one of the conditions of thought, and would it not be necessary that the latter should be extinguished, in order that the desire in us to be happy should cease? It is an almost paradoxical boldness to question the value of an ideal in happiness, when in effect it seems to be the sole reason for life.

But what is happiness? And first of all, what definition can one give of it? Does it consist in love, glory, power? On the contrary, is it not merely an expectation, never satisfied, never tired? The hope that lasts, the dream that begins again, do not these offer more return than the reality of happiness? Are they not indeed the whole of the reality which they contain.<sup>12</sup>

Besides, how may one formulate a common ideal of happiness? To every man his own dream; but the idea of individual happiness is a kind of nonsense. As soon as we look for it outside of our conscience it depends upon too many causes and too many persons. We are part and parcel of humanity as a whole; so long as the sum of evil in the world shall surpass that of good there will be no happy exceptions. Every suffering has an infinite repercussion in the feelings of all beings. Evil makes people wicked; a bad action is the source of an infinitude of cruelties and miseries. In order that a single being may meet with the conditions sufficing to happiness, it is therefore necessary, that humanity as a whole should be happy. In order to be happy it is necessary first of all that the happiness

*Note 12.*—Happiness probably is merely the adaptation of the being to its surroundings and to external circumstances. Thus it is only a result; but it is that very result which the æsthetic life dares to promise, since, with its ideal of beauty, our faculties and social conditions harmonize better every day.

should be moral. Until that point is reached, individual happiness can only be an accident, the intellectual satisfaction of the results reached in the pursuit of the Ideal. Ah, truly, happiness—if it is here than to dissipate our powers in its conquest! If not to be illusory—we have better things to do down life has any value, if human will possesses any empire over inert things, we are worthy of a nobler ideal!

Follow nature! said certain ancient sages, and some modern. But it is a battlefield that nature offers us: nature herself makes war on us there. Can we submit the conceptions of our thought to the brutality of natural powers? One single will reveals itself in the sub-human universe, the triumph of force. Is it not precisely the honor of mankind to dominate little by little the blind violence of nature by the power of the ideal? But everything is met within nature; everything that exists is born through the play of its law—good as well as evil—thought and the moral will, as well as the grosser appetites and bestial ferocity. Oppose nature and the Ideal? Nothing more irrational! Morality and the Ideal are merely the loftiest limits in the evolution of nature.

Nature progresses. One might say: progress, there's the Ideal! I will agree, if one considers progress as the intellectual, æsthetic and moral ascension of humanity. But the entirely materialistic idea which our contemporaries assume in progress—that I reject. I like much better the passion, somewhat low, of pleasure, than the more and more exacting egoism of well-being and the madness of the industrial miracle. Science has a finer part to play than covering the earth with workshops and factories.

What nobler ambition for human creatures could there be than the conquest of truth? An infinite ideal which the world offers to scientific curiosity! A collective ideal and for that reason singularly peacemaking. Could humanity make a more beautiful dream than that of sovereign power which science promises? Absolute knowledge—so long as power is not attached to it—would not that offer to the human soul an enjoyment lofty enough in order to fulfill our need of an ideal? Has not science intoxications equal to the most profound emotions of nature?

Is she not that Ideal, at once the highest and most attractive, which we seek? It is hard to answer, no. The scientific ideal would be an immense deception for humanity. The creation of science could not be the work of the whole of mankind; the great crowd would not collaborate in it; how then could it be interested? As soon as it leaves the laboratory of the learned, science becomes an entirely egoistic pleasure. In reality it is a privilege in a society where the material task of earning one's livelihood allows of so little leisure to the greater number of people. For them close study would be a fatigue over and above, added to the forced pains of getting one's bread. Now a truly philosophical ideal ought to be universal—one that is accessible to all. Knowledge can only be an individual idea. Must we add that science does not include a single moral element, that no sympathetic energy radiates from it, and that it leaves the will-to-good inert in the soul?

Among the different optimistic conceptions which

I have passed in review the greater number are materialistic—one, namely science, entirely intellectual. Now it is a moral ideal which humanity needs.

Modern philosophy has presented the terrestrial hope of happiness as a principle to morality. The moral ideal constitutes itself with altruism, humanism and the religion of humanity. But humanity—even if conceived of as a grand eternal Being or as a Providence keeping watch over itself—can humanity inspire that enthusiastic love which fills the whole soul and fecundates it? One may be allowed to doubt that. Scarcely do we love mankind; we see their imperfections too clearly. Grand passions suppose a certain recoil of the vision, that crystallization of isolation which social life makes impossible. Our egoism is clumsy; we love ourselves very badly, without boldness and without grandeur. How could we be compelled to love mankind? Love is free. It is by tricks that beneficent acts are obtained from us; in our good deeds it is ourselves whom we love and admire. The feeling sprung from the beauty of a gesture is much more efficacious than a cold love. The æsthetic is the secret of devotion. What moral culture is able to teach us—and here it borrows from the idea of justice a singularly lofty element—is the duty of considering the happiness of others as equally important with our own. In this respect humanity will come to admit an arithmetic or happiness.<sup>13</sup>

The arithmetic of happiness will cause the exigencies of egoism to incline before the greater happiness of a single person or the larger sum of happiness of the many. But altruism is full of pitfalls. To charge oneself with the happiness of others is to arrogate to oneself a hateful despotism over them. Our nature has made us the arbiters of our own happiness, and if it be true that the pursuit of happiness promises more joy than its conquest, the tyrannical benefactors who deprive us of the pleasure of that pursuit dilapidate our treasure. In truth people can never preach altruism too much, profoundly hostile as it is to the egoistic instincts of nature. But nature does not put aside its instincts; one can only transform nature by seizing upon the instincts, through directing their evolution. An eternal law charges us to assure our good through ourselves. Arithmetic of happiness cannot be a constant principle of conduct; only then does it find its application, when, in a conflict of interests or passions, the altruistic solution can be reckoned by results at once positive, certain and more moral than the egoistic solution.

Some thinkers propose an even broader ideal than humanity: collaboration with the universal society of the worlds. I ask nothing better than to collaborate in their task. But what can the object be? I needs must know, and no one dares to tell me!

Thus, of all the theories which I have attached to the optimistic principle, sometimes by fragile connecting links, not one appears to me worthy to be proposed as an ideal to humanity. Lacking a lofty moral inspiration or unprovided with that seduction which exalts the will, all these solutions are impotent.

Note 13.—In England Mr. Sidgwick has evolved from this conception of altruism an ingenious theory which Spencer criticises in his *Evolutionary Morality*.

The conceptions which pessimistic sentiment inspires are stamped with the same sterility. Religious and spiritualistic philosophies sacrifice our miserable terrestrial existence to the life of the future, so serious, nevertheless, that an eternal sanction is suspended upon our daily faults. We will not say that one or the other is illusory, for this not a work of polemics. But it is still needful to observe that by instituting a sanction—even though it were not infinite—spiritualism, whether philosophical or religious, renounces veritable sanctity; that by invoking an obligation, constraint and threats, it abdicates that sovereign power over souls which only appertains to passion.<sup>14</sup>

The grand modern religions of every ancient origin—Buddhism and christianism—both lack the perfect purity and the truly moralizing influence which we seek.

Mournful is the philosophy of the Buddha. Its moral of love extends to the entire creation, even spares the savage beasts; but it can imagine no farther goal for perfection, no other hope in life than Nirvana, which at one and the same time is the end of desire and the definitive annihilation of the being, the supreme stage in the long pathway of souls across wretched existences. Lofty doctrine, of a verity, which conceives of the world as a vast moral hierarchy, as an infinite becoming, the good of which is eternal aspiration! But the morality of Chakya-muni, entirely alien as it is to the idea of God, nevertheless admits metempsychosis and preserves a sanction: if good, then we climb a few rungs on the ladder of being, the last rung of which, reserved for the most saintly, for the Buddhas, is Nirvana: if bad, the falling back into evil and misery. The doctrine of Buddha is entirely diminished by that sanction; it is not a pure morality, it is an atheistic religion—sublime, but one that will not escape the corrupting influence of apostles and priests.

Perhaps still mournfuller is christianism with its Paradise inaccessible and morose, and its eternal hell—that religion of terror where, through the involuntary fault of the first man, every man is born a criminal, where life and eternity unroll themselves beneath the never-appeasable menaces of punishment, all the symbols of which evoke suffering, where suffering itself is a virtue, a duty, a ransom! Sweet, I agree, was the soul of Jesus, sublime his doctrine of love. But how shall we recognize the divine word among the furious dogmas of the Christian religions? If at least Jesus had not said: "My kingdom is not of this world!" There would have remained of him (but that would have been enough to fill all the human soul) only the adorable precept: "Love one another!" By adjourning the hope Jesus has adjourned love. *Love one another!* That word had resounded in China, in India six centuries before Jesus, perhaps yet earlier in the night of the ages. Why was it necessary that the supra-terrestrial interest should have debased the practice of charity, the brotherly works of love, in order to forge I know not what letters of exchange on the Creator? With its sacraments, penitences, its disproportionate penalties and indulgences, its devout fetichism, its prayers, offerings that imply a corruption of the god-

head, Catholicism has rotted the doctrine of Jesus.<sup>15</sup>

How much loftier, at any rate in their initial aspirations, are the systems of pure morality!

Pure morality is that which borrows nothing from metaphysics or psychology and remains alien as well to the idea of a rational finality, as to one of sanction. It does not ask that it shall be realized, or whether it can be; it exists, in a way, for the nobility of existing.

It is irreligious and sometimes atheistic. It does not know whither man goes; it finds its end in itself and only hopes in its own self. If vulgar morality is an interpretation of the meaning of life, pure morality disdains to inform itself concerning that.<sup>16</sup>

Moral will it is that gives a meaning to life. Let them prove it by psychology, by the eternal evolution of things; it affirms the meaning *a priori*. It does not know nature until the moment that it combats nature. Should false logic deduce a moral law, a will of nature from natural selection, from the struggle for existence, it rises up against that brutal law, against that immoral will. Nature? Gladly it suppresses the instincts of it, forgets the exigences of it. Oftenest it ignores them. That is because it sees beyond and aims higher. Its function is to erect above the wills of nature—which, often malefic, are in themselves neither bad nor good—the moral and beneficent will of man. It dares to assign to us an end independent of divine decisions, and even conceives the possibility of a moral revolt against the injustice of God. No doctrine more hostile than this toward an experimental demonstration; it is capable even of ignoring human malignity and only divines it in order to display before it the magnificence of a sublime ideal. The aim of pure morality is absolute morality.<sup>17</sup>

*Note 14.*—One of the most energetic causes of the dissolution of religions is the condemnation which they pronounce against terrestrial hopes, which life reveals at every moment, and which the imagination cannot do without.

*Note 15.*—One can hardly say which is the more pessimistic, a belief that lays its hope in the nothing, or a religion that opposes to a gleam so feeble the desperate shadows of eternal damnation. It is difficult to believe that any other doctrine has brought into alliance, like Buddhism and christianism, the exquisite feeling for charity, and the most atrocious metaphysical imaginings.

*Note 16.*—The meaning of life? An ambiguous expression which ought to be cleared up. It signifies, in fact, at once the explanation of life—that is to say, of the entirety of causes which govern life—and the direction of life.

At bottom the two significations of the word singularly flow together. Every direction is determined by causes; causes start a direction; final cause and first cause cannot abstract themselves one from the other; principle and consequences are indissolubly united. Pure morality is preoccupied with knowing neither by what laws life is explained, nor what direction these laws impress upon it.

*Note 17.*—I admit that this name of pure morality does not satisfy me. I would have preferred the appellation of independent morality. But it has been given to systems of morality liberated without doubt from metaphysics, or at least from religion, yet founded on psychology, and thus deriving the law of conduct from our own powers. So I hold to the name of pure morality. Kant made use of it in the same signification which I intend here; that is justification enough?

*To be continued*